

Getting to Yes

Strategies for Volunteer Recruitment

By Susan J. Ellis

Expect more adult leadership help when you apply this simple framework.

Unsure about how to recruit new volunteers? Don't worry. After all, someone was successful in recruiting you into Girl Scouting, right? Here are tips to motivate people to say "yes":



1.  Don't confuse recruitment with publicity. Sending out a flier or email notifying a long list of people about unfilled volunteer positions is information, but not necessarily an invitation to come forward. Never assume everyone "knows" what help is needed or whether she or he is right for the job.
2. Be clear on what you want people to do before you recruit them. Writing volunteer job descriptions forces you to be specific. Avoid the vague approach of "Do you want to volunteer?" This can lead to all sorts of incorrect assumptions about what the tasks might be. Instead try: "Would you be willing to coordinate the cookie delivery and distribution process next month?" It is more appealing to be asked to become a "service unit manager," "troop leader," or some other definable role, than an indistinguishable "volunteer."
3. Be honest. Tell prospective volunteers about the time and effort the role entails, even if you think it may sound like a lot. Don't minimize the work with comments such as "This will only take a few hours" or try to sway people into acceptance with "Why not try it and see what you think?" If you need someone several hours every week, or for a full year's commitment, or willing to drive 25 miles each time, say so. It may take longer to find someone willing to fill the position, but once you do, you'll have the right person.

4. Define the training, supervision and support the volunteer will have. Many people are understandably cautious about being thrown in to sink or swim. If they know they are going to get help while they learn the ropes, they'll be more likely to give volunteering a try.

5. Identify and express the positives of volunteering. Explain how much girls will benefit from their help but talk unapologetically about personal payoffs, too. Be aware that people have different reasons for volunteering. Some enjoy interacting with girls, others want to learn a skill for career development—the list of possible motivations is extensive. You can share how you've grown personally from your own volunteer work for Girl Scouts—and don't forget to point out that they'll have fun!

6. Explain why you decided to ask this particular person to help—what skills or personality traits make her or him a good candidate for the position. After all, you are implying this person has the talent to do the job, and that's quite flattering. In the long run, it is better to live with a vacancy for a while than to appoint someone who is unqualified or reluctant to make a full commitment to the work. A second-choice placement can negatively affect all the other volunteers on your team.

7. Never recruit anyone by asking her or him to do it as a "favor" to you. Instead, try to communicate that you don't want them to miss a marvelous opportunity to participate in an important project!

8. Finally, the best way to recruit volunteers is simply to ask people to help. If you never have the conversation, how can someone say yes? And if you are turned down, keep in mind that you have still helped the Girl Scouts by reaching out to new people and lending visibility to worthwhile projects.